

I recently subscribed to XM satellite radio. I have it in two vehicles. I commute daily between Towson, north of Baltimore, to Arlington, south of Washington, DC.

Timely traffic reporting is extremely important to help me navigate this long and difficult commute. In DC, even WTOP's excellent "traffic and weather on the 8's" is sometimes insufficiently timely to help me decide which route to commit to.

But in Baltimore, nothing even comes close. I have the option of taking I-95, I-895, or I-695 north to Towson, and I cannot count on getting accurate traffic from broadcast radio even if I tune in prior to Route 32, almost halfway to Washington, DC. The XM traffic service -- for which I happily pay -- has been a godsend to me.

Significantly, the XM service, because it is not constrained by time limits imposed by ads, is usually more comprehensive. Some of the over-the-air traffic reports, especially in the Baltimore market, are extremely abbreviated and sometimes next to worthless.

I willingly pay for the XM service. The addition of traffic reporting in two markets that I travel in was an important factor. I am shocked that the FCC, which has attempted to foster competition in other areas, would even entertain a petition to prevent satellite radio from broadcasting traffic and weather. The petition is clearly motivated solely by the superiority of the XM product. I note that OnStar, which I have in one of my vehicles, also offers traffic reporting (I do not subscribe to this); since I've not heard about the NAB trying to suppress this competing service, it is clear that the current petition is motivated solely by fear of satellite radio's success.

The over-the-air broadcasters have gone through an extended period of homogenization and consolidation, both in commercial (ClearChannel and Infinity) and public radio (replacement of local programming by monotonous rebroadcast of the same talk shows, now on three competing major NPR stations in the Washington-Baltimore market).

The FCC should let the over-the-air broadcasters respond to satellite radio's challenge by improving their own programming, so that listeners might want to tune in, instead of suppressing superior services. I have spoken with other automobile commuters in this area: we share stories of stepping through presets and "scan" trying to find something worth listening to on the over-the-air broadcasts during commuting hours, when these broadcasters have thought they held us hostage. With satellite radio -- for which users such as myself are perfectly happy to pay -- we now have a better alternative.

From a regulatory standpoint, I don't see any difference in this issue than allowing satellite dish TV providers to rebroadcast local over-the-air TV stations.

Thank you for your consideration.

-- Paul Arnest